

THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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GRETCHEN.

By the Author of "Dame Durdan," "My Lord Conscit,"
"Darby and Joan," "Corinna," etc.

BOOK IV.

CHAPTER I. OH, IRONY OF FATE!

A MONTH had passed.

Summer was at its height, and the burden and heat of scorching days and feverish nights, of many anxious hours and fitful hopes, had robbed Gretchen's cheek of its bloom, and her step of its lightness.

Adrian Lyle's illness had been more serious even than she had imagined. Never once had he been fully conscious since that night. She had been able to learn nothing more of his reasons for coming to her; she had not the vaguest idea of where he lived, or what friend might be awaiting news of him.

Her own life was just the same. Since that one brief note from Neale, she had heard no more. The first sharpness of agony had given place to a dull ache which never seemed to leave her. She would lie awake for hours on these long hot nights, staring helplessly at the bright sky, or the stars that glittered above the tall tree tops; hating even the cool pulses of the dawns that once had seemed to hold all possibilities; dreading thought, and dreading sleep; and tortured as all young, passionate, unreasoning lives are tortured, for want of the patience and the stoicism which only such tortures teach. It was not only the pain of absence, but the pain of distrust, that she had to bear. It seemed to fill her life and shadow its merest details.

Senses, desires, memories, were all acute, yet a blight seemed to cover her once harmless joy, and she grew restless as

a caged bird in this pretty leafy shelter that had seemed to her once an ideal home.

The old servant noticed how wan and listless she had become, but put it down to the anxiety and care of this long illness. She had refused to have a professional nurse, and took her turns of watching and attendance with rigorous exactitude.

July had followed its sister month, and August had taken its place.

One morning, while the day was yet young, she rose and dressed, and went softly to the sick-room. As she opened the door and looked in, she saw that old Peggy had fallen asleep in her chair at the foot of the bed.

Softly she stole in and went up to where the sick man lay. He was wrapped in slumber—deep, dreamless slumber—the first that had visited his fevered brain for all these weary weeks.

Relieved at such a hopeful sign, the girl moved away to the window and stood there, looking out on that waking world, of which most of us know so little, and care less.

Gretchen both knew and cared. She had always had an intense love for Nature in its every mood and phase. Wearily she leant against the window frame, letting the cool fresh air blow as it would over her loose, rich hair, and touch with tender caress the wan young face.

The beauty which had been hers—that delicate, intangible beauty of extreme youth, exquisite as the bloom of a peach, the petals of a flower—had been suddenly extinguished. She looked like some beaten-down lily as she stood there in the golden glow of the morning light, every line of the fragile figure betokening weariness, and languor, and pain.

It was to see her thus—to see her standing there in her white gown, and with the

sunlight warm on cheek and brow—that Adrian Lyle's eyes first made use of recovered consciousness.

For a moment he thought he was dreaming. Weak as a child; scarce conscious of what he was doing, or where he was; he tried to raise himself on one feeble elbow, and gently called her name.

She turned at once, and looked with startled eyes at that weird and haggard spectacle of manhood's weakness.

In a second she had crossed the room and was by his side.

"You are better!" she cried eagerly. "Oh, I am so glad—so glad."

He sank helplessly back, dizzy and faint, as with some great shock of joy.

"Why are you—here?" he whispered with effort.

"Hush," she said. "Do not speak. You are still so weak and ill. Oh, but it is good that you should know me at last! But I must not let you talk or you will be ill again, and," nodding her pretty head gravely, "I do not want to nurse you all over once more."

She held some cordial to his lips, and he drank it unresistingly, then his eyes closed for very weariness, but he could not sleep with that unanswered wonder in his brain. "Tell me," he urged faintly, "where I am? I will promise to ask nothing more."

"You are with—me," she said softly, "in my own house. You came to see me—do you not remember?—on the night of the storm. You would not stay, and I think as you went out of the gate the lightning struck that great tree beside it, and one branch struck you. You lay there all night—and I never knew. Oh," clasping her small hands eagerly, "if only I had known! But in the morning I found you, and you have been here ever since. And now you are going to get well, and reward me for all my anxiety, are you not? For indeed I was very, very anxious."

"And how long ago," he asked faintly, "was that storm?"

"It must be nearly a month," she said thoughtfully. "And now please do not talk. If you will only try to sleep, that will be so good for you."

He felt the touch of the little hand on his brow; he felt her smooth the pillows; the scent of the rose at her throat seemed to his sick fancy sweet as no earthly flower had ever been; and then a great peace and calm stole over him, and he fell asleep in unutterable content, and so slept on till noon was well past.

The crisis was over. The fever had left him—spent, exhausted, weaker than any year-old child, it is true, but still safe, and with steps set towards that first stage of convalescence which means so much after weeks of pain and dread.

Gradually, as that first day lapsed into other days, and he gained strength and memory with each, he remembered that no account of his strange absence had reached his Rector, and besought Gretchen to write and inform him of the accident. She wrote the letter at his dictation and sitting by his side, and it was while watching her at the task that Adrian Lyle first noticed some strange, indefinable change in her face. It struck so coldly, so suddenly, that he lost the thread of what he was saying, and remained gazing at her with something of horror in his startled eyes. Wondering at his silence she looked up, and met that strange, questioning glance.

"What is it?" she asked, frightened at some revelation that set her pulses leaping in an odd, nervous fashion which had come to her of late.

"You," he said hurriedly; "are you ill? have you been ill? There is, I am sure there is something."

A little faint flush rose to her cheek. She did not speak immediately, but as she raised her hand to push back a stray lock of hair, the loose, white sleeve fell back, and he saw how painfully slender it looked—how clearly the delicate tracery of veins showed through the transparent skin.

"I am quite well," she said almost impatiently, "only the heat makes me tired. Please go on."

He continued dictating. But that vague uneasiness could not be stilled. He grew restless and ill at ease. As yet he had not had courage to ask news of Neale Kenyon; but he summoned resolution now, and put the question abruptly, almost roughly, as she stood a little apart sealing and stamping the concluded letter.

Her face grew cold and pale; she bent it hurriedly down over the envelope. "Do you not know?" she said. "I thought he must have told you. He has gone to the war!"

"The war!" echoed Adrian Lyle stupidly. "What war?"

"There is war," she said, "in some part of India. His regiment was ordered there, and he has gone. Did he not tell you?" she repeated.

"No," said Adrian Lyle. "It must have been very sudden."

"It was," she said, trying hard to control her agitation. After a moment or two she turned her face to him. "You have never told me," she said, "how you found me here that night; you said you had heard I was ill, and had sent for you, but that was not true. Neale could not have told you—that."

"No," said Adrian Lyle, "it was not Neale; it was Bari."

"Bari!" she cried, pale and startled. "He—he has never been here. How could he say what was so false?"

"I cannot tell," said Adrian Lyle, his brow growing stormy. "It was an infamous lie. I suppose he had some object. But I cannot fathom it at present."

"Nor I," she said. "You must have thought it very strange."

"At first, yes; but he led me to believe that you were unsettled about religious matters, that you wanted counsel and assistance."

"I have wanted that often," she said sadly; "but I should not have troubled you, though I believe in your friendship. And to think," she added indignantly, "that you have undergone all this suffering and danger for the sake of Bari's falsehoods. What could have been his object?"

"I cannot tell," said Adrian Lyle; "but I will find out," he added determinedly. "I will find out!"

Then, for the first time, something like awkwardness and embarrassment took possession of him. He was lying here helpless and ill. Kenyon was away. Yet, in his absence he had been lured to his wife's side by a false message. What did it mean? He moved restlessly on his pillows.

"I shall soon be able to relieve you of the burden of my presence," he said. "I cannot tell you how grieved I am to think of all the trouble and annoyance I must have occasioned."

"Indeed, no!" she said simply. "It was so much my own fault. I should not have allowed you to leave in such a storm. But you hurried away so quickly—and I was so surprised——"

"You must have been," he said bitterly. "More especially as you had forgotten my very existence—so you were frank enough to tell me."

"Ah, yes," she said penitently, "that was not a polite welcome, was it? But I was too startled to think of what I said."

"I hope," Adrian Lyle murmured gently, "that you will always speak the truth to me without regard to politeness. I can't bear to think of you as anything but perfectly frank."

"I always am that," she said, "to you."

She put the letter down and seated herself on the low chair by his bed.

"Shall I read to you?" she said; "there is still an hour before tea."

"I think," he answered, "I would rather talk—if you do not mind."

"Oh no," she said, putting the book on the table beside her, "if you are strong enough."

"I am certainly that," he said with a faint smile. "For I must leave you to-morrow, or next day."

She looked up startled and pained.

"Leave!" she cried. "Oh, that would be foolish, indeed. You would only make yourself ill again. You are far too weak to move."

"I can be taken to the inn in the village," he said resolutely. "I have asked the doctor to let me go there."

"The inn!" faltered the girl. "But why will you not stop here? I can take as good care of you as the people at the inn. It is only a poor, rough place."

"It will do," he said resolutely. "Oh, cannot you understand? It is not fitting I should stay under your roof, while your husband is away."

She looked up at him pale and startled.

"Why should he mind?" she asked.

"You are his friend too!"

"Perhaps," said Adrian Lyle coldly. "But you must allow me to judge what is best and fitting. You are young, and innocent, and unworldly——"

"I feel old enough," she said wistfully, as he paused.

His eyes turned yearningly and regretfully to her face. It was changed, most sadly changed, though as lovely in its pallor and delicacy as ever he had deemed it in its bright, fresh youth. She leant forward a little, and clasped her hands upon her knees.

"I am so lonely," she said; "do not go."

It seemed to Adrian Lyle that, often as that formula, "lead us not into temptation," had been on his lips, he had never fully understood its meaning till this moment.

The swift beating of his heart almost stifled him; the stillness of the room; the faint scents of the roses in her dress; the

face itself looking back to his own with such beseeching eyes—all seemed like part of some strange dream. But there was pain in the dream—pain, real, and acute, and hard to bear in this hour of physical weakness.

He dared not look at her. He wondered if she heard those slow heavy throbs that beat like hammers in his brain. How could she be so unconscious and—he—so overpowered!

She spoke again, and a little pale effort at a smile touched her lips.

"I know you are resolute and hard to move, and my powers to persuade you are so feeble; but when one is all alone, and has no friend anywhere, it seems hard to look forward to——"

Then her voice broke. He saw great tears gather in her eyes; her lips quivered like a child's.

"Oh," she cried piteously, "I must tell you, or my heart will break. I have no one—no one. And Neale has gone so far, and will be away so long. It is terrible to be alone as I am alone. And he says I must stay here till he returns. Oh, Mr. Lyle, would he—would he be very angry if I went to him?"

"Went to—him!" echoed Adrian Lyle. "My poor child, it would be madness. You could not reach him. Besides, it is not allowable for officers to have their wives with them when they are on active service. You would only make Kenyon doubly anxious. Did he not explain all this to you?"

"I did not see him," she faltered slowly.

Adrian Lyle started.

"Do you mean to say that he did not come here to bid you good-bye?"

She shook her head.

"There was no time," she said loyally. "It was all so sudden."

He looked at the altered face; the bent head; the slight, fragile young figure. Well enough he read the secret of their change now; and that change added the bitterness of another burden to his heavy heart.

"Poor child!" he said pityingly; "poor child!"

"Oh—don't," she cried quickly, "don't pity me. I can't bear it. It—it has been very hard; but I was getting over it. I think having you to nurse and think of helped me. And if only it were not so—so lonely——"

There was a pause which seemed to Adrian Lyle to hold a lifetime of silence. Thoughts,

vague, wild, confused, whirled through his brain; the brain that was still weak and dizzy from the shock of that terrible illness. She was lonely, sad, in trouble; she needed a friend; and he was so great a coward that he dared not trust himself in her presence, dared not shelter beneath the same roof. He felt he could cry shame on himself; but he was so weak now, and so unhappy, that he could have turned his face to the wall and wept like a woman. The effort would cost him hours of after suffering; but he made it nobly and heroically, speaking to her as he would have spoken to a grieving child; for what was she but a child still?

"You must try," he said, "to be patient and brave; it is the duty of a soldier's wife. After all, it will be best for a few months, at most, this parting. To follow Kenyon would be impossible. Had it been otherwise, you may be sure he would have done his best to take you with him. The separation must be just as hard for him as for yourself."

She swayed towards him with a little unconscious movement.

"Oh," she said simply, "how kind you are! The very tone of your voice holds comfort. No doubt you are right. It was not his fault, and I ought not to have blamed him; but it did seem hard just at first."

"Did you blame him in your heart?" asked Adrian Lyle, with a faint, sad smile. "I fancy you only imagined you did."

"Yes—it hurt me," she said, her voice a little tremulous. "Written words sound so cold, and I had not seen him for so long."

"Did you know he was at Medehurst Abbey?" asked Adrian Lyle.

"No," she said in surprise. "He only said he was going to London when he left me here, and his letters were from London. Who lives at Medehurst Abbey?"

"His uncle and cousin," said Adrian Lyle. "Do you mean to say he has never told you of them?"

"No," she said. "I knew he had some relations. He said it was duty for him to go and see them. I do not know their names. Is the cousin a lady?" she asked with sudden curiosity.

"Yes," answered Adrian Lyle.

"And—and young, and beautiful," she went on, gazing at him with sudden interest.

"Men say so," he answered indifferently. "Your husband does not think so. I believe he rather dislikes her."

For a moment she was silent, her eyes on the circlet of gold which she was absently turning round and round on her slender finger.

Adrian Lyle watched her, reading plainly enough the trouble in the passionate young heart.

"She is too young for that sting to pain her heart," he thought. "What has chilled that beautiful faith, I wonder?"

"How did you know her?" she asked presently.

"How?" Adrian Lyle started. His thoughts had been far away. "Oh, you mean Miss Kenyon. I am living close to the Abbey. I am curate at Medehurst Church."

"And Neale was there—staying there?" she persisted.

"Yes. That was where I met him for the first time since we parted in Rome."

"Ah," she sighed, "dear Rome, how beautiful it was!" Then her eyes drooped, her voice grew softer and more wistful. "Do you remember," she asked, "that day in the Pantheon, and all you said?"

"I remember," he said huskily, "only too well."

"I thought of it all," she said, "when you lay here so ill. I suppose it was being unhappy and lonely that brought it all back. When one is happy, one does not think much."

"I suppose not," he answered gently.

"You had forgotten me, I know."

"No—not forgotten; only put you aside for a little time."

"Well, you have made amends," he answered. "To your care and nursing I owe my recovery. It is a debt I can never repay."

"And yet what haste you are in to leave me!" she said reproachfully.

The blood rushed like flame to his cheek. "For your own sake," he said falteringly. "It would not do. I am sure Neale would not like it."

"There," she said quickly, "you are wrong. He would like what I liked—he would bid me do just as I pleased."

"Don't make duty harder," said Adrian Lyle, with an attempt at lightness. "You know I am an obstinate man."

He kept his eyes resolutely away from the sweetness of that beseeching face. He felt that the worst phase of his madness was this phase, when every innocent look and word could so bewilder his brain, and tempt both sense and reason.

She rose from her low chair at last; a

little startled look came into her eyes. "I have talked to you too much," she said; "you look so pale and tired. I will leave you now if you will promise me to try to sleep. There—let me smooth your pillows more comfortably. Is that better?"

"It is delightful," he said, keeping his voice steady by a great effort. "I will take your advice and try to sleep. Would you mind drawing that blind down? Thank you, that will do—the light dazzles me—a little."

He turned his face away; he heard the faint, soft flutter of her gown across the floor; he heard her open the door—close it—and a great darkness and horror seemed to come over him; and he lay there staring blankly, stupidly at the wall, conscious only of an agony which had threatened to master self-control—conscious that something hot and burning touched his cheeks, something that was far removed from sleep, or rest; and, as he lifted his hand and drew it across his eyes, he saw it tremble like a leaf.

"Oh," he cried, "to think that I should be so weak—so pitifully, miserably weak."

CHINESE SUPERSTITIONS.

"It is New Year's Day, and the first great duty of every householder is going forward. Master and man are busily engaged in the worship and propitiation of their household gods." Thus wrote Augustus Margary in the City of Chefoo, on the seventeenth of February (Chinese New Year), 1874.

And this is what he saw of the strange ritual, beginning before daylight, and amid the weird, fitful glimmer of a few candles: a dim, uncertain light, not without its influence on the superstitious devotees. A table was neatly laid out with a cold banquet, with seats, plates, and chopsticks, so that the spirits of the departed might come and enjoy. After a preliminary ceremony, consisting of the burning of joss-sticks and of kneeling and kow-towing before them, master and man took their places behind the empty seats, ready to attend to the wants of the invisible guests. There they remained in silent and reverential readiness for a time sufficient to enable the spirits to conclude their feasting satisfactorily; and, as a full-blown ceremonious Chinese dinner continues for hours, we may suppose that the greater portion of the day was thus consumed. Then, when it

might reasonably be concluded that the guests had finished, a tremendous "feu-de-joie" was fired outside the front-door. As at the same moment the same thing is being done in every house in China, the expenditure on gunpowder alone must be considerable.

On an island in the Tungtin Lake, called Chun-shan, celebrated for producing the finest tea in China, Margary encountered a perfect plague of flies, which followed him right across the lake, and never ceased to torment. These flies are armed with a strong proboscis, with which they inflict a sting as acute as that of the mosquito, although not venomous. They sting without leaving either mark or pain after they are brushed off. The Chinese say that these flies are the soldiers of the Lake Spirit, who sends them to attack all intruders in his domain.

Shang-le, or precious relics of Buddha, are so abundant, that only a miracle could explain their number. Dr. Medhurst throws some light on their history. According to the Buddhists there are eighty-four thousand pores in a man's body, and, therefore, he leaves behind him eighty-four thousand particles of miserable dust in the course of transmigration. Buddha had also eighty-four thousand pores in his body, but by his resistance to evil he was enabled to perfect eighty-four thousand relics through them, for which eight Kings contended. A good and wise King, named Ayuka, arose, who built eighty-four thousand pagodas to cover these eighty-four thousand relics. These relics still remain, but can only be seen by the faithful. A good Buddhist can sometimes discern one of these relics illumined with brilliant colours and as big as a cart-wheel, when unbelievers are unable to see anything at all.

A superstition, current in some parts of China is, that earthquakes are caused by the shaking of some huge subterraneous animal. Mr. Robert Fortune relates that when he was at Shanghai in 1853, there was a slight shock, and, after it was over, he saw groups of Chinese about the fields and gardens, industriously gathering hairs of the mysterious animal! Hairs they certainly did collect; but a close examination showed that some were mere vegetable fibres, and others the hairs shed by dogs, horses, or cats, which might be gathered any day. The pointing out of these facts did not shake the belief of the Chinese that the hairs were really those of the earth-shaker.

The worship of the moon—the Queen of Heaven—is universal, and the images of Kwan-Jin with a child in her arms are to be found everywhere. This goddess is prayed to by women who are desirous of having children, and when they enter the shrine they leave their shoes there. It is not unusual to find a whole heap of the small shoes of the Chinese ladies in these sacred places, and the suggestion occurs whether the old custom in our own country of throwing an old shoe after a newly-married pair, for luck, may not have had some remote connection with the superstition still existing in China.

The river Tsien-tang, on which is situated the city of Hang-Chow, is famous for its "eagre," or "bore," which far surpasses, we are told, the "bore" of the Hooghly. It is regarded by the Chinese as one of the three wonders of the world, and must be, indeed, a sufficiently awe-inspiring spectacle. It makes its appearance in the spring-tides, and rushes up with a noise like thunder—a wall of water about thirty feet high and four or five miles broad. This natural phenomenon is attributed by the Chinese to a Mandarin, one Wu-Tsi-si, who, having offended the Emperor, was slain and thrown into this river. His rage at the treatment was so great that he exhibits it periodically by taking the form of the "eagre," and breaking down the river's banks and flooding the adjoining fields. Successive monarchs of successive dynasties—for the incident happened long before the present era—have conferred titles on him; temples innumerable have been erected in his honour; and prayers and sacrifices are periodically offered to him; but still his anger endures, an example of sustained "vendetta" which, no doubt, would be well appreciated in Corsica.

Chinese junks and boats have eyes carved or painted on the bows, which are usually supposed to be a mere fanciful form of ornamentation. But they have a real meaning, as Mr. Fortune found. In going up one of the rivers from Ningpo, he was startled by one day seeing a boatman seize his broad hat and clap it over one of the "eyes" of the boat, while other boats on the stream were similarly blinded. Looking about for an explanation he saw a dead body floating past, and he was told by the boatman that if the boat had been allowed to "see" it, some disaster would surely have happened, either to passengers or crew, before the voyage ended!

Mr. Dennys, who has told much of the folk-lore of China, says that in the Lui-Chau district, the belief exists that violent winds and typhoons are caused by the passage through the air of the "Bob-tailed Dragon," and also of the rain-god, Yü-Shüh. Similarly when a storm arises, the Cantonese say: "The Bob-tailed Dragon is passing." There is a temple in the Lui-Chau, dedicated to the Thunder-Duke, in which the people every year place a drum for the demon to beat. In olden days the drum used to be left on a hill-top, and a little boy was left along with it as a sacrifice.

The God of Fire is an object of much respect among a people whose dwellings are so combustible. In all the cities, temples are erected and kept in first-rate order to his honour. The story goes, that the Emperor Kien-Tsing had the misfortune to have his magnificent Hall of Contemplation, which had been erected at vast expense, burned to the ground, because one little temple to the Fire-God outside the walls of Pekin had been allowed to fall into disrepair. And yet, as a curious instance of the flexible character of the religion of this curious people, it may be mentioned that the home of the London Medical Mission in Pekin is one of the old temples of the Fire God. Dr. Dudgeon purchased it for a hospital, and all the wooden and gilded idols were sold as curiosities. Some of these idols were dissected by Dr. Dudgeon, and were found to contain careful representations of all the internal arrangements of the human body. This is done because of the belief that as nothing is hidden from the gods, they can of course see the insides of the images erected in their honour, which images, it will be observed, can nevertheless be made subject to trade, when occasion arises.

Apropos of the Fire God, Miss Gordon-Cumming mentions having seen, beside one of the gates of the city of Foo-Chow, seven stone water-jars, each enclosed by a stone railing. The tradition is that, so long as there is water in these jars there will be no fire in the city; and hence it is the duty of a special official to see that, even in the driest season, the water is not allowed to dry up.

One of the religions of China is the worship of Fo or Buddha, of whom it is believed that immediately after his birth, he stood up and said: "No one except myself, either in heaven or upon earth, ought to be worshipped." At the age of seven-

teen, Fo married three wives; at nineteen, he retired to study under four sages; at thirty, he became a deity, and thenceforward began to practise miracles; at seventy-nine, he passed into an immortal state, leaving behind him eighty thousand disciples. These published five thousand volumes in his honour, and related that Fo had been born eight thousand times, his soul passing successively through different animals. The five commandments left by Fo were: I. Not to kill any living creature; II. Not to steal; III. Not to commit any impurity; IV. Not to tell a lie; V. Not to drink wine.

Another religion is that of Tao, which, as well as that of Fo, has its orders of monks and established monasteries. The monks or priests of Tao are a sort of Epicureans, who teach that happiness consists in a calm, which suspends all the operations of the soul. They live in communities, do not marry, use chaplets, are clothed in yellow, and always officiate at funerals and sacrifices. They believe in a plurality of gods; and are much given to occult science, practising alchemy and pretending to magic arts, which afford them familiar intercourse with spirits. The importance of this power is well realised in China, where it is supposed that every part of the universe is under the influence of good and bad spirits, who have their respective districts. The good spirits are a kind of tutelar genii, to whom sacrifices are offered in the temples, as well as to the spirits of the rivers, the mountains, the four parts of the world, and so forth.

The Heavens and the Earth, however, are regarded rather as intelligent beings, or divinities, and in Pekin two of the most magnificent buildings are the "Temple of Heaven" and the "Temple of Earth." In each of these temples, the Emperor officiates in person once every year, going in great state, attended by all the nobles and a vast crowd of choristers and attendants. In the grounds of the Temple of Earth he goes through the ceremony of ploughing several furrows, afterwards sowing the seeds with his own hands. This may be taken as not only a tribute to the deity, but also as a practical example and encouragement to the people to practise agriculture. For a most interesting account of these remarkable temples and their ceremonies, the reader is referred to Miss Gordon-Cumming's "Wanderings in China."

In Canton there is a temple dedicated to

the Five Rams, on which the five genii, who preside over the five elements of Earth, Fire, Metal, Water, and Wood, descended from heaven to Canton, bearing ears of corn and other blessings. These rams are said to have become petrified into five great stones, which now ornament the temple. Here, also, is shown a colossal foot-print of Buddha in the rock.

In another temple in this city is a shrine to the god Lin-Fuung, whose function is to aid in restoring runaway slaves to their masters. Beside his image is that of an attendant on horseback, waiting to do the bidding of the god; and on the horse's neck the suppliants tie cords as a hint that they desire their slaves to be found and restored to them.

A method of ascertaining the will of the gods is divination by the Ka-pue, a piece of wood shaped like an acorn, in two halves, one side convex, the other flat. "The person who wishes to consult the oracle kneels reverently before the image of the god or goddess whose counsel he craves, and, having explained the subject on which he wants advice, he takes the Ka-pue off the altar, passes it through the smoke of the incense, and then throws it upward before the idol."

According to the manner in which the two halves fall he reads his answer. Thus, if both fall flat, he knows that his prayer is refused; if both fall on the rounded side, then the god has really no opinion in the matter; if one falls flat and the other round, then his prayer will be granted.

A little skill and preliminary practice would, one might think, be sufficient to procure a favourable augury whenever required.

There is another method of divination by means of strips of split bamboo, each numbered. These are placed in a stand and gently shaken until one falls out. The number on this is compared by the priest with a corresponding number in a book, from which he reads the oracular reply. This is strikingly like a practice related by Tacitus of the Germans. He says (German., Chap. x.): "They cut a rod off some fruit tree into bits, and after having distinguished them by various marks, they cast them into a white cloth. Then the priest thrice draws each piece and explains the oracle according to the marks." There is in both superstitions also a suggestion of the divining-rod, or magic wand, not unknown in our own country.

In China we find another instance of a

superstition akin to one of our own. Thus the Governor of the Province of Fuh-Kieng not long ago issued a proclamation to the following effect: "You are forbidden, if you have a grudge against any one, to practise the magic called 'striking the bull's head,' that is to say, writing a man's name and age on a scrap of paper and laying it before the bull-headed idol, and then buying an iron stamp and piercing small holes in this paper, and finally throwing it at the man on the sly with the intention of compassing his death." Compare with this the fact that, so recently as 1883, a case occurred at Inverness of an assault because one person discovered that another person had made a clay image of him and stuck pins in it, with the object of compassing his death! Belief in witchcraft is not altogether dead even in our enlightened land, but happily it is rare.

Du Halde, who wrote a "Description of China" about 1738, says that the practice of magic and the study of astrology were carried on in China as a recognised branch of learning, and that even the Tribunal of Mathematics devoted itself in part to the occult. One of the functions of this Tribunal was to foretell eclipses, so that the common people might be warned beforehand, and be ready with great shouts to frighten away the demon who was supposed to be endeavouring to devour the sun or moon. Much of the magical arts and curious superstitions mentioned by Du Halde as prevalent a hundred and fifty years ago, seem to prevail still, for we find Miss Gordon-Cumming in 1879 encountering similar experiences. This last writer observed that in Chinese houses the traditional "horse-shoe" of our country is there replaced by a sword-shaped toy made of hundreds of the small copper coin or "cash," fastened together with red thread. This is hung up for luck, while charms written on red paper, and fire-crackers made up in scarlet covers, are used to frighten away devils. The virtue attached to the colour "red" particularly attracted Miss Gordon-Cumming's notice, because she remembered that in Scotland, till very recent years, it was a common practice for cowherds to tie a sprig of mountain ash with red twine to the door of the byre, or to twist a red thread round the cow's tail.

One of the risings against the Christians at Foo-Chow, when many of the native converts were ill-treated, was a result of a

distribution over the province of a powder, warranted to prevent calamity and disease. As soon as this had been eagerly purchased by the people, a notice was placarded everywhere that this powder was not what it professed, but had been distributed by the "foreign devils," in order to strike, as with subtle venom, everyone who used it with a terrible disease which only the missionaries could cure, and that only on the condition of the sufferers becoming Christians, and practising all manners of vile crimes. The fact that this calumny was universally believed at the time, sufficiently shows the strength of the belief of the Chinese of today in sorcery.

The great overruling superstitions of China are, however, the fear of the dead, and the belief in Feng-Shui. The latter word means literally "wind and water," and seems to typify both the good and the baneful influences of physical phenomena. It is the existence of these two superstitions which really forms the barrier to progress in China, because they interfere with the reception of foreign ideas and the development of industrial projects in mining, railway making, and so forth. Feng-Shui is defined, says the Roman Catholic Bishop of Ningpo, as "the path of the Great Dragon, who rushes through the air just above the houses, spouting blessings in showers from his nostrils. He flies straight forward, unless by evil chance he should strike against some high building, in which case he turns aside at an angle, and so the houses beyond lose their share of his blessing. Hence the zealous care of the Chinese house-builders lest anyone should build a house higher than his neighbour, and the singular uniformity of domestic architecture."

The fear of the dead leads to the most slavish form of ancestor-worship, and the three first weeks of April are specially devoted to the service of the Shades. At that time everyone visits the graves of his relations with offerings, carried on trays or in baskets. The cost of these annual services and offerings to the dead is stated by Miss Gordon-Cumming to be not less than thirty-two millions sterling, all to propitiate the spirits of those whose graves cover the country, and who are believed to be powerful for evil if neglected. The dead are even honoured by the bestowal of new titles if there is special reason for distinguishing them.

After a person dies, the body may not

be buried until the soothsayers have selected a "favourable day," and this they may not find it convenient to do for a year or more, if there is money forthcoming for the various tests. These professional geomancers make a very good thing out of the superstitions of the people, for the stars are supposed to affect not only individuals but also every day in the year, for good or evil. "There are certain days," says Miss Gordon-Cumming, "on which no man in his senses will shave, lest he be afflicted with boils; others, on which no farmer would sow, else a bad harvest would follow. There are days on which no man would buy or sell property; others, when to dig a well will ensure finding only bitter water. To open a granary on certain days would be to admit mice and mildew; to begin roofing a house on a given day betokens having soon to sell it. There is one day on which no householder would repair his kitchen fireplace, as his house would inevitably ere long be burnt. Another day is shunned by matchmakers as ensuring ill-luck to the wedded pair. One day is especially dreaded by shipbuilders, for, to commence building a ship or to allow one to sail thereon, is to court shipwreck. So in the rearing of cattle; the care of silkworms; in travelling or staying at home; days of luck or ill-luck must be specially observed, lest the stars in their courses should fight against the presumptuous mortal who ignores them."

Not exactly a superstition, but interesting as bearing a close resemblance to the European legend of the Swan-Maiden, is the Chinese legend of Ming-ling-tzu. This, in the story as told by Dennys, was the name of a poor farmer, who, going one day to draw water from a well near his house, found a woman bathing in it. Annoyed at having his well fouled and scandalised at the "shameless ways" of the female, Mang-ling-tzu carried off the clothes which she had hung on a pine tree. When she emerged from the bath he confronted her, and, having duly scolded her, took her to be his wife, but refused to give her back her clothes. They lived together ten years, and had two children, and then, one fine day, the woman bade these farewell while her husband was absent, climbed a tree, mounted thence on to a cloud, and, gliding off upon it, was seen no more.

And to conclude this paper, as we began, with the New Year, we may mention a curious custom in Canton, on the authority of Miss Gordon-Cumming. In that city—we know not if universally in China—it is

a positive necessity for all accounts to be settled before the close of the old year, and tradesmen will then sell their goods at any price in order to meet their liabilities. Any one who fails to do so is disgraced, and his name is written on his own door as a defaulter. Debts, which are not settled on New Year's Eve cannot be subsequently recovered, and, therefore, a creditor will pursue his debtor all night long in order to procure payment in time. He is even permitted to lengthen the night by the fiction of carrying a lighted lantern even after daybreak, as if it were still night.

There is one thing, however, which always protects a debtor from an importunate creditor, and that is the presence of a corpse in the house. For this reason, dutiful children will often retain their father's body in the house for years, knowing, in the midst of their grief, that so long as the body is with them, they can be neither dunned for debt nor "evicted" for rent, should they find it inconvenient to pay.

RACECOURSES ABOUT LONDON.

EPSOM.

NOT always had the citizens of London to seek their recreation at a distance, even at such a moderate distance as Epsom. "Without one of the city gates," writes the Monk of Canterbury in the twelfth century, "is a certain plaine field"—the Smithfield of to-day, devoted to the carcasses of cattle, "Smithfield, or the field of Smiths, the grove of hobby-horses and trinkets," of Ben Jonson's day; but in the time of Fitzstephen the Monk, "a celebrated rendezvous of fine horses, brought thither to be sold. Thither came Earls, Barons, Knights, and a swarm of citizens; races are run there, and the course cleared with shouts."

As we read we fancy we hear the roar of voices from the modern racecourse, as the serried ranks of burly policemen push the crowd before them, with the oft-repeated cry, "Off you go! off you go!" Yes, we still clear the course with shouts, and seven centuries in passing over the land have only strengthened and confirmed the national passion for horse-racing—Earls, Barons, Knights, or Baronets, at all events, and crowds of citizens are still to be found where races are run; and if the Earls, Barons, and the rest of them, have not kept pace with the increase of population, the swarms of undistinguished

spectators have, and to spare. As the greatest crowds of all the year find their way to Epsom, to Epsom let us go.

It is not easy to fix a date when Epsom first became famous for its races. The Downs were, no doubt, always the resort of the people of the country round for sports and exercises, among which horse-racing would have a conspicuous share. But the first meeting on record was rather in the nature of a conspiracy, a number of Royalist gentlemen of Kent and Surrey having met, towards the end of the Civil War, under pretext of a horse-race, and there collected some six hundred horses, which were marched to Reigate in aid of the projected rising for the King, then a prisoner.

This incident led to the general suppression of racing during the Commonwealth, as affording dangerous opportunities for the Royalist gentry to assemble; and thus, perhaps, first arose a kind of religious intolerance for horse-racing, which has surely no adequate foundation. Cromwell himself might have backed his White Turk over the Knavesmire, and the strictest sectary of the day would hardly have found fault, and John Milton's poetic soul would have rejoiced in one of the great gatherings of the day

Where throngs of Knights and Barons bold,
In weeds of peace, high triumphs hold,
With store of ladies, whose bright eyes
Rain influence, and judge the prize.

Before the troubled times of the Civil Wars racing had flourished at an equal rate with the increase of wealth and luxury. Newmarket was already a centre of the sport; races were always going on in the vicinity of the Court, whether the King were at Theobald's, Windsor, or Whitehall. In the neighbourhood of the last, Hyde Park was the principal scene of races, whether horse or foot. Shirley's play of Hyde Park, which was licensed in 1632, gives us a lively picture of an impromptu race-meeting of the period. A band of gay young fellows, with the ladies of their choice, set forth from their lodgings on foot, to witness and share in the sports. A noted gentleman rider, Jack Venture, is among the party, and is asked for a sporting song upon the way:

And as we walk, Jack Venture, thou shalt sing
The song thou mad'st o' the horses.

As Jack's song gives a good list of the horses famous at the period, while some of the names are not without associations

of their own, we may be allowed to give a verse or two :

Young Constable and Kill Deer's famous,
The Cat, the Mouse, and Neddy Gray ;
With nimble Peggybrig, you cannot blame us,
With Spaniard nor with Spinola.
Hill-climbing White Rose praise doth not lack,
Handsome Dunbar and Yellow Jack.
But if I be just, all praises must
Be given to well-breathed Jilian Thrust.

Another verse celebrates Sloven, with true-running Robin, Young Shaver, and Strawberry Soam, a name probably perverted by the printer of the period from Strawberry Roan ; "Fine Brackley and brave lurching Bess." And, skipping a name or two not exactly fit for ears polite, we may give another verse :

Lusty George, and gentlemen, hark yet !
To winning Mackarel, fine-mouthed Freak,
Bay Tarral that won the Cup at Newmarket,
Thundering Tempest, Black Dragon eke,
Precious Sweetlips I do not lose,
Nor Toby with his golden shoes.
But if I be just, etc.

Chorus, gentlemen, if you please ! And when we reach the course, our stage directions give : "Confused noise of betting within," just such a confused roar as we may hear on any racecourse at the present day. Ah, that betting ! They were at it hammer-and-tongs in the year sixteen hundred and thirty odd, just as they are in this jubilee year of grace ; and far beyond our day in the centuries that are to come, the prophetic listener may hear that "confused noise of betting."

While the gentlemen are gaming, drinking, and racing, the ladies are eating syllabub at the lodge and saying ill-natured things to each other with the most charming smiles. Meanwhile, Jack Venture is mounted for a match ; his own nag against another ridden by a professional jockey. Venture gets the best of the jockey at the start, and leaves the latter at the post. The betting is any odds on the gentleman, when Jack steers his horse into a quagmire and tumbles into the mud, while his adversary canters home a winner.

Shirley's play was thought enough of to be revived after the Commonwealth, and Pepys chronicles the performance when real horses were brought upon the stage, all which goes to show the popularity of horse-racing and the enterprise of managers at a period which is not without its resemblance to our own.

The advent of the Merry Monarch brought life at all events to Epsom. The first race meeting after the Restoration was held on the Downs on the 7th March,

1661. The stakes then run for were what we should now consider trifling, as appears by an announcement of a subsequent race meeting in the "London Gazette." "On Banstead Downs two plates of twenty pounds value each to be run for on May Day, and the other on Bartholomew Day following ; for any horse that shall be at Charshalton, Barrowes Hedges, or some of the contributors' stables fourteen days before." The stakes were three guineas apiece, and were divided, no doubt, as an addition to the plate. The races were then run in heats, so many separate matches, as was the case in nearly all races during the subsequent century. Long distances were the rule, and the cruelty of such an ordeal for horses may be judged from a sporting print of the eighteenth century depicting the preparation of a horse for his final heat, the poor animal, exhausted and almost foundered by a recent struggle, being vigorously rubbed and anointed to bring him up to the post for another race.

A little of this racing lore is necessary to bring us into a suitable mood for approaching Epsom, where we may hear plenty about the more modern history of its racecourse. But a jaunt to the Downs is as pleasant a diversion as can be imagined, when the first fine day of the season tempts you abroad—whether with sporting notions or in the pure delight of loafing. The season is spring, of course, or speaking in the language of Epsom, between the "City and Suburban" and the "Derby." There is a city and suburban air about the way down certainly till we reach Worcester Park, where there are big country houses that look as if they ought to have each a park to itself, with woods, and commons, and farmsteads dependent, but all standing in a row, as if this were an asylum for country houses, brought low by agricultural depression. Now this name, Worcester Park, sounds like a builder's name, invented for the benefit of the substantial houses just mentioned. But this is not the case, for this is really Nonsuch Great Park, that was cleared by Henry the Eighth when he built Nonsuch Palace—cleared of population, that is, of houses, cottages, and churches. There is a kind of lost parish about here, a mere wandering name, in the way of Cuddington, where manor-house, church, and village all disappeared to make room for Nonsuch. And now the Palace is gone like the village, and has left not a wrack behind.

Nearer Ewell is the site of the Palace itself, the wonder of its age.

This which no equal has in art or fame,
Britons deservedly do None-such name.

A wonder in plaster and wood-work, with turrets and pinnacles, and adorned with statues, waterworks, and all kinds of strange devices. Henry the Eighth did not live to see his Palace finished, but Elizabeth liked the place, it seems, and often stayed there—notably on the occasion when the Earl of Essex was received there when he came back from Ireland without leave, and was so badly received that he presently rebelled, and suffered. In after times, the Palace was neglected and abandoned till Charles gave it away to Lady Castlemaine, who broke it up and sold it for building materials.

But by this time, Epsom itself is below us, with its cluster of red roofs; a town that is best described by the epithet "neat"; what special character it has being due to its wide, open High Street, a market place rather than a street, with its modern market cross in the way of the clock-tower. But it is in its expansive little suburbs that Epsom is most pleasing: little settlements, scattered here and there in corners and by road-sides; red roofs spreading out under wider spreading elms; a morsel of common; a pond where Mother Goose majestically struts with her brood of goslings; and cottages where flowers seem to sprout and blossom with the smallest amount of cultivation. The way to the Downs is always pleasant, except perhaps in the choking dust of a Derby day; but there is no dust to-day, only sunshine delicately filtered through the leaves. The birds are singing bravely, a sustained chorus from the old ancestral groves in the background with soloists warbling and flourishing from the blackthorn hedge, while the deep caw of the rooks breaks in with harmonious discord. There is the soft tinkle of the sheep-bell too as the flock is spread along the road-side, seeking tender morsels in the hedge-banks.

The red-brick, Hanoverian-looking mansion—quaintly sequestered and yet close to everywhere: to the course; to the town; to the mill; to the stables with their neat rows of loose boxes like almshouses; to the paddocks, where the brood mares are just turned out and are sniffing the fresh grass, while their foals stilt delicately at their sides; the sweetest of spots, for one who loves both town and country, horses and humanity—is Durdans; and the

old ancestral groves are in Woodcote Park. Durdans, an old writer says, Aubrey perhaps—but in old writers we need not go behind Manning and Bray in that monumental history of theirs in which everything seems bottled up—Durdans itself was built up of the materials of old Nonsuch Palace. Now to a cursory view, it seems built of the ruddiest of red bricks; and then we find that old Durdans was burnt down and with it the last relics of Nonsuch, and the present building has only suggestions of Prince Fred, who inhabited it in the days of his dissensions with his peppery, apoplectic papa.

At that time Woodcote was owned by Lord Baltimore, the Prince's favourite companion. Lord Baltimore's ancestor had been a favourite too of King James and King Charles, and had received a grant of all Newfoundland, and as that, although an extensive estate, was not so profitable as might have been expected, the district now known as Maryland was thrown in. And, while this noble Lord took his title from an obscure town in County Longford, Ireland, the chief town of Maryland, now with its two hundred and fifty thousand or so of inhabitants, was called Baltimore in his honour.

As for Prince Fred's Lord Baltimore, there is a kind of human interest about him too; for we may remember a certain charming young widow, Mrs. Pendarves, who was afterwards Mrs. Delaney, and as such dimly apparent in memoirs and literary chronicles of the period. Now Mrs. Pendarves fascinated John Wesley in his youth, and he would gladly have married her no doubt, and, with an accomplished and well-connected woman of the world for his wife, would probably have risen rapidly in the Church; might have become Dean, Bishop, Archbishop even, but not the founder of a new religious movement. But all this was prevented by the fair widow's strong attachment to Lord Baltimore, who seems to have trifled with her affections and to have married someone else.

The son of this Lord Baltimore was a terrible scoundrel, and made Woodcote a by-word in the neighbourhood. He narrowly escaped the hangman's rope as a righteous penalty for his misdeeds, having brutally and forcibly abducted a pretty and innocent City maiden. But, although acquitted on his trial, he could no more show his face in the country, and sold everything and went abroad. With him, this not

highly distinguished line came to an end, with nothing left but a monument or two in the parish church to show that they ever existed.

When we have passed by the shades of Woodcote we are on the verge of the Downs itself. Dark against the sky, as you top the hill, rises the well-known outline of the Rubbing House, as it is called, a name that suggests the ancient practice of racing in heats, and the vigorous rubbing that was required to bring the poor beasts up to the starting post again. Now it is a public-house, where internal lotions alone are administered; but this is the point which, seen from the neighbouring hill on the great days of the Epsom calendar, seems to throb and palpitate with life as all the hosts with horses and chariots burst forth upon the Downs. The stands, white and glittering, are thrown out with strange lurid effect against a dark mass of stormy clouds, and there is something in the wild sweep of Downs that is at once savage and imposing, notwithstanding all the congress of booths, and stands, and hoardings, and railings that encumber the ground. The summit of the semicircular ridge that forms the racecourse is so broad and level that it must have suggested races to the least civilised of the ancient inhabitants of our island. There is the happy circumstance, too, of the hill that rises within the compass of the semicircle and affords a prospect of the whole course, and the ravine, whose commencement is just marked on the rim of the course, gives the gentle up and down so trying to horses as they turn the bend towards the winning-post. From the crest of the hill, occupied by the Grand Stand, a marvellous panoramic view is extended, that is, when it is to be seen at all. But the country towards London is generally clothed in a confused kind of vapour, and all the vast crowded region of palaces and hovels, domes and towers, is seen only darkly here and there.

On this grand plateau racing, as we have seen, has been going on for centuries; but it is only since 1730 that meetings have been held regularly each year at an appointed time. The week before Whitsuntide became generally known as the appointed time for the popular gathering, except under certain conditions of the calendar, when it was held a fortnight later. Then the races began at eleven a.m., and soon after one p.m. the whole assemblage adjourned to the town to dine and smoke, and discuss the events of the morning, and

regulate the bets and stakes for the sports of the afternoon, which were then brought to a leisurely conclusion.

It is not easy to trace the development of the racehorse as he now exists, with his length of stride, and muscular strength combined with lightness of frame and vast going power. Many of his best qualities he owes, no doubt, to the original strain of Arab blood that is in him, derived from the Darley and Godolphin Arab, the Byerley Turk, and other noted sires of the early racing era; but these qualities are combined with others derived from many varieties of the choicest European strains, the result of the persistent selection of generations of enthusiastic breeders, greedy of fame and, perhaps, a little of guineas.

Among the earliest of these scientific breeders of horses was "Butcher" Cumberland, the hero of Culloden, who reared the best horse of his, or perhaps any period, the magnificent Eclipse, "built i' the eclipse," or rather foaled, during the portentous darkness of the great solar eclipse of 1764. Cumberland sold Eclipse as a colt to one Wildman for forty-six guineas, and Colonel O'Kelly bought the horse subsequently for one thousand seven hundred guineas. Never beaten, never touched by whip or spur, the magnificent chestnut ran a short but glorious career upon the turf, and then retired to the stud, where he proved a fortune to his owner, and became the sire of the best horses of succeeding times.

For some years Eclipse and his less distinguished owner lived at Epsom, where Colonel Kelly occupied a house on Clayhill. Eclipse Cottage is still in existence to preserve the memory of the famous horse, whose hoof set in silver is one of the precious insignia of the Jockey Club. When Colonel O'Kelly left Epsom for Cannons, a carriage was specially built to convey the horse to his new quarters. At that time the notion of a horse driving in his carriage instead of drawing it himself, was a novelty to the public, and crowds thronged to see the triumphal progress of the favourite. He was as good as he was swift and beautiful, without a particle of vice in his composition, and with his head out of his carriage window Eclipse benignantly surveyed, and seemed to give his parting blessing to, the crowd.

While Eclipse still walked the earth, or was transported triumphantly thereupon, one of the worthies of the turf, Edward Smith Stanley, twelfth Earl of Derby,

began his racing career. This was in 1776, an epoch which may well be called ancient in the annals of the turf, while Lord Derby's death in Plenipo's year, or in the chronology of every-day life, A.D. 1834, was an event which may be remembered by many yet living men.

It was Lord Stanley's friend, General Burgoyne, who first brought him to the neighbourhood of Epsom. They had been old school-fellows at Westminster, and were staunch friends through life. The General's military career had finished disastrously at Saratoga Springs, with the surrender of his army to the Americans; his official and political career had been put an end too by Royal disfavour with the loss of all his appointments. It was then that he sold the Oaks, which had been previously a public house, and which the General had converted into a snug little sporting-box, to his friend. An excellent fellow was Burgoyne, a man of many parts, a wit and dramatist with a light happy touch, that might have made his fortune in these days of a not too serious drama. A bright little trifle called the Maid of the Oaks, performed with success by his Majesty's servants at Old Drury, was suggested by the fête—the fête champêtre as it was then called—held at the Oaks to celebrate the marriage of Lord Stanley and Lady Betty Hamilton. In 1779, Lord Derby, as he had now become, inaugurated the first year of the Oaks Stakes, called after his little house on the Downs, by winning them—the Stakes that is—with his filly Bridget. The Derby Stakes were instituted in the year following and called after his popular Lordship, and the first Derby was won by Sir Charles Bunbury, with his Diomed, on the fourth of May, 1780.

The Oaks, as it now exists, lies about half-way between Epsom and Croydon, near Woodmansterne village, above which the Downs rise to their greatest height in this part of the county. After Lady Betty's death Lord Derby, it will be remembered, married Miss Farren, the actress; and on the death of his friend Burgoyne, who left not a sixpence behind him, he took charge of his children, and brought them up at the Oaks, and the eldest boy turned out a gallant soldier, and died not so many years ago a Field-Marshal and General, Sir John Fox Burgoyne.

Having brought Epsom races into the modern field, their further history is rather

a matter for the historian of the Turf than for a rambler by the way. But old turfites will recall the great scandal of Running Rein's year, 1844, when the winner was proved not to be himself at all, but a horse a year older, and was disqualified, and the stakes awarded to the second horse.

If we turn our backs to the Grand Stand and the noise and tumult of the racecourse, we see the ravine that begins at Tattenham Corner widening out and deepening, and leading into the thick of a quiet, pleasant country, where the spire of Headley Church stands out as a beacon visible for miles around. And this way, when races are on, come a stream of people from Sussex and Hampshire. There is a regular pilgrim track over the Downs; country yokels, with shining, rosy faces, brown and nimble-tongued men from Hants, who, whatever their general avocations may be, present a compact and horsey appearance to the eye; scarlet and blue from Aldershot; and a Jack Tar or two from Portsmouth. All the last part of the way the great white stand and its towers, beginning to be speckled with human ants, shine out as landmark and guide. The cottagers have turned out and have spread tables under the trees, with ginger beer, and bread and cheese, and home-made pies. There was an old man, some years ago, who sat under some noble beeches by Walton Down watching the petty traffic carried on by his grandchildren, who used to tell how, for more than seventy years, he had come out to watch the Derby people go by, but had never been over the hill to see the race, although the noise and turmoil of the course could be heard from where he sat.

Few who visit Epsom think of its once-celebrated wells, the mineral springs that supplied the once-famed Epsom salts, the sulphate of magnesia, once sold at five shillings an ounce, but now manufactured by the ton—for dosing cotton cloth, and not human beings, fortunately. The wells lie on Epsom Common, which is of a clayey and tenacious nature, and an evil place to be caught in a downpour of rain, for there is not a tree or a bush to shelter under; but, as its chief frequenters are ducks and geese, this does not so much matter. Of the little pleasure town that grew up about the wells there is not a vestige. Ball-rooms, taverns, family-hotels, dancing-booths, gaming-booths, all have vanished. A new house has been built upon the site of the centre of all the gaiety

of old times, and within an outhouse the wells still give forth their once-renowned waters—proudly advertised as containing four hundred and eighty grains of calcareous nitre to the gallon, thirty-six more than Acton, one hundred and eighty more than Pancras, three hundred and four more than Holt, and two hundred and eighty more than the Dog and Duck, St. George's Fields!

But these envious rivals, too, have vanished from the field, although they were in full swing when Burgoyne wrote the Maid of the Oaks, from the Prologue to which we may quote:

Now Marybone shines forth in gaping crowds!
Now Highgate glitters from her hill of clouds!
St. George's Fields, with taste and fashion struck,
Display Arcadia at the Dog and Duck.

"THAT DAY IN JUNE."

Ah, love! do you remember?—sweet old phrase,
For twilight hours, and fire-enlightened gloom,
That seem to people all the shaded room
With forms and faces from a long dead past;
And through all, like the key-note of some tune,
Come back the dreams of one fair day in June!

Dear love! don't you remember how the moss
Curled golden green about our shaded seat?
How ferns and flowers clustered at your feet?
How rang the birds' full-throated melody?
That peaceful, lovely, perfect summer noon,
Whence dates our lives: for we loved first in June.

Ah, love! do you remember?—filling eyes
With joyful tears; yet since that sweet day died,
Many and bitter are the tears you've cried,
Many the furrows on your dear white brow!
Yet in mine arms, I cannot deem that soon
Faded the radiance of that day in June.

Nay, 'tis not faded, darling; but 'tis strange
How all our loving cannot banish death!
We were so young then; now the winter's breath
Shrivels and pinches where the blood once coursed,
Leaping with rapture; o'er the fire we croon,
And scarce believe that once we loved in June!

Dear love, always remember; years pass on,
Mingle with dust, and leave but little mark;
The light burns lower, nearer comes the dark.
Yet 'twill not matter, if still lives our love,
E'en in the night our lives shall have their moon—
The fair remembrance of that day in June!

MY FRIEND CROCKER.

"You cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear."

This is one of those blossoms of imagination wherewith old-fashioned people—otherwise guiltless, and even disdainful of anything like a flight of fancy—are wont to deck their discourse; and its general meaning I take to be that you cannot expect a gracious action from an ungracious person: the silk purse standing for some fruit or other of one of the

Christian virtues, and the sow's ear for a person placed, let us say, considerably nearer to Caliban than to Crichton in the human hierarchy.

In this matter, as in most others, I fear the public estimate is prone to be biassed by external considerations, and to demand a pound of moral worth to atone for a grain of boorishness.

"My dear, there is nothing that helps one on so much as making a favourable first impression. Mrs. Dunham, the new Vicar's wife, was quite right to wear that real cashmere when she made her first calls, though she may have borrowed it from her aunt, as Miss Sharpe declares she did."

I remember hearing these words from a venerable old lady, as harmless as a dove, and certainly as wise as a serpent; and ever since I have had a profound appreciation of the importance of dazzling and captivating the world's eye at once. Many things will be forgiven him who never treads on a corn, or commits a solecism, or makes an ugly exhibition of himself generally.

My friend Crocker is certainly one of the most disagreeable men it has ever been my fortune, or my misfortune, to meet. Whenever I come across him, his manner gives me the impression that something must just have happened to put him in a bad temper. If I remark that it is a fine day, he replies that he has got a particular pain in his right shoulder, which always precedes a thunderstorm; and if I say that it is an unpleasant day, he will tell me that to-morrow will be much worse.

And yet Fortune has dealt no blows at Crocker, to sour his nature and convert him into a sort of vulgar Timon. After a youth and prime well spent in distributing the common necessities of life, he enjoys his ease in his villa at Upper Clapton; a pleasure-house, built after his own design, and surrounded by all the accessories dear to the heart of the citizen freed from his duties. He has a roomy four-wheeled chaise, and a horse which never falls lame when he is most wanted, as the horses of retired citizens have a common trick of doing. His Jersey cows give the thickest of cream, and his garden the juiciest of strawberries and pears. His house suits him perfectly, though to me it is the "amari aliquid" in the sweets of fortune surrounding him. Nobody but Crocker could have built such a house, and yet he had as pretty a six-acre meadow, as any to be found in all the home counties, to begin upon.

To paraphrase the epigram spoken concerning a witty but immoral gentleman of the last century, one might say that nothing but such a house could deform such a landscape, and that nothing but such a landscape could render such a house endurable. It is built of sulphur-coloured white brick, with dressings of red ditto up the angles and round the windows. The roof is covered with the most uncompromising and hideous steely-gray slate. It stands four-square, a perfect cube, with a small excrescence at the back devoted to the scullery, and on to one side is tacked a conservatory, which, with its adornments of blue, and red, and ground glass, is probably the most hideous thing on the premises.

Crocker, like most other disagreeable persons, is a man of strong opinions; and, having built his house to please himself, he is firmly convinced that it is the most desirable residence in England. Whenever he takes me for an afternoon drive in the roomy chaise along the lanes—once country, but now suburbanised out of all knowledge—he pours out the vials of his sarcastic wit over the stupid fools who have wasted their money over the gewgaw rubbish, which he scornfully designates here and there by a wave of his driving whip. The “Domestic Gothic” structures of twenty years ago, the “Queen Anne” villas of to-day, he condemns outright. “Now, if that man had been satisfied with plain brickwork he might have saved twenty per cent. on his outlay, and had just as good a house; and if he ain’t a fool, I’d like to know where you’d find one.”

He is of opinion that all men under five-and-thirty are “whipper-snappers,” who ought to keep themselves discreetly in the background, speaking when they are spoken to, and listening respectfully to the discourse of himself and others equally worshipful—himself especially. I have known him now for nearly twenty years, my hair is getting grey and thin too; but I never make a statement in Crocker’s presence without a qualm, for he has always exercised upon me most generously his powers of snubbing and putting down ever since I was first introduced to him. Anything in the shape of a figure of speech acts upon him as a scarlet umbrella affects a turkey-cock, and I confess I am often tempted to get petulant and snappish with him in our discourse on occasions when we may have travelled beyond the limits of the identical proposition. I may

here remark that the identical proposition in the familiar saying, that a spade ought to be called a spade and not an implement of iron and wood compounded for the purpose of digging, holds high rank in Crocker’s list of aphorisms. It is rather hard to have all one’s flights of fancy swept into a heap, and ticketed “nonsense” by a man whose aspirates—but, hold, enough! I will not be mean enough to canvass the peculiarities, results of a neglected education, of a man who, in my days of early struggle, lent me that fifty pounds which enabled me to snap my fingers in the face of the Sheriff of Middlesex. I admit I am always sorry for my ill-temper five minutes after I have transgressed, for, after all, it is as reasonable to be irritated with such a man for not appreciating my tropes and metaphors as to chide him for not being six feet high.

It is not Crocker’s fault that in the course of a meritorious commercial career he has acquired the habit of looking at things as they are, and not as they might be; of expecting a due correspondence between bulk and sample; of taking now and then a careful inventory; and dealing on no system which will not stand the test of a rigorous audit. Crocker, in short, talks, and thinks, and reasons—as he formerly retailed colonial produce—on a strict system of double entry.

After saying so much it will be hardly necessary for me to set down the fact that Crocker is a utilitarian of the deepest dye. I have never dared to call him one, for were I to do so I am sure I should be met with the rebuke that he was a grocer—a retired grocer if I liked, but a grocer for all that, and nothing else. Amongst his other failings, Crocker is undeniably purse-proud. But suddenly the question suggests itself to me, why is purse pride worse than other pride? It is the exaltation of the conqueror over the spoils of victory, and nothing else. The successful grocer has prevailed over the combined forces of the retail buyer and the wholesale seller. He has wrung from them the tribute due, and marches off in triumph to enjoy the repose of peace at Upper Clapton.

We do not gibe at the soldier who carries his medals on his breast with conscious pride, so let us be a little tolerant to Crocker’s self-gratulation over his stocks, and shares, and comfortable balance at the bankers. But however charitably we regard this weakness in theory, there is no doubt that practically Crocker is not

very pleasant company when he gets upon this particular hobby. When one is despairingly conscious that the water-rate falls due to-morrow, and that the tradesmen are waxing insolent, it is not soothing music to hear, metaphorically, the continual chink of the sovereigns in the breeches pockets of others. Somewhat in the spirit of the fox under the grape vine, I begin to speculate whether unlimited cash is such a wonderful blessing after all; whether I—a man with five children, deriving a fairly good though precarious income from connection with the public press—may not possess a store of wealth, in the shape of a lively imagination and a poetic temperament, worth all Crocker's much vaunted belongings put together. It is when I venture to advance a proposition of this sort that we come the nearest to an open rupture. Crocker refuses altogether to admit that there can be any value in anything one cannot touch, or taste, or handle, or that the pleasures of the imagination, about which I am constantly dropping hints, have any real existence. When I venture to remark in a delicate way that those people who regard only the practical side of life miss half the joy of living, Crocker will either preserve a contemptuous silence, or reply by asking me point-blank whether I have discovered a way of paying a butcher's bill which is other than practical. One day, I remember, I went down with Crocker to see the Bushy chestnuts, then in their full beauty. I never understood how it was that I succeeded in beguiling him to take a journey in search of the picturesque, and as long as I discoursed on the wonderful beauty of the trees Crocker kept a disdainful silence. When, however, I went one step further, and affirmed that no amount of money could represent the value of the pleasure given year by year by the flowering of this lovely grove, I roused the spirit of the British tradesman.

"How could one appraise," I asked, "the sum of wealth represented by the delight given every spring to the thousands and thousands of Nature-lovers, cooped up in London, by the sight of these big mountains of flower and foliage, ever the same yet ever new, and lying within the reach of everyone with a few hours to spare, and pence enough to pay the fare of the river steamer?"

Crocker let me go on with my rhapsody, and I found he was evidently on the "quiver," and taking note of what I was saying,

for he began to figure and make calculations on the back of an old envelope. At last, when the stream of my eloquence had dried up, he said:

"Now just look 'ere. Anything as is worth anything 'll find it's way into the rate-book, some way or other, and be rated accordingly. Can you find this here pleasure, as you make so much fuss about, rated to any parish hereabouts? You can't. I didn't think you could. Now I calls the place just waste ground, and nothin' else. Cut down the trees; sell the timber and invest the proceeds; let the ground on buildin' leases, or for market gardens, and apply rent and interest of ditto to help to pay the school-rate. Then I'll agree with these bein' a real walloo in the place. I once had a counterman as was allus a runnin' down 'ere o' Whit Mondays, and what profit he got out o' the chestnuts I don't know, seein' as he left just enough to bury him, and I did hear arterwards as his widdler had to go to the workus."

After what I have written above there can be little doubt, I fear, that Crocker must be set down as a Yahoo, a Philistine of the most pronounced character, the distilled and concentrated essence of all that is most odious in the British vestryman, the most unfavourable material, in short, out of which the silk purse—still keeping up the metaphor—could be manufactured; in other words, a sow's ear, and nothing else.

Crocker, however, has in no way suffered moral shipwreck. As a father, a husband, a citizen, his record is spotless; he is by no means a Helot, to be exhibited as a warning to our younglings; but he, hapless wight, has had the ill-luck to flaunt all his imperfections in the face of the world; and, as I remarked in the beginning, he will have to furnish a huge mass of probity to overshadow and banish from sight these affronting traits, which doubtless spring from some digestive derangement rather than any internal depravity. And now it will be my pleasing duty, by way of falsifying the maxim which stands at the head of this paper, to show what progress Crocker has made in heaping up his expiatory pile of good works; how far Crocker, in his private life, differs from Crocker the lord and master of the villa at Upper Clapton.

I have already alluded, in passing, to a slight pecuniary service formerly done to me by Crocker; and I will at once let it

be known that this service, in itself no inconsiderable one, does not represent a tithe of the practical benefits I have received from my porcupine-like friend. He is god-father to my eldest boy, Ebenezer Thomas—Ebenezer, after Crocker; Thomas, after my wife's uncle, Bullifant, late Mayor of Coggeshall, Essex—and it is owing to his sponsor's beneficence that Ebenezer wears the becoming uniform and studies the humanities and mathematics at Christ's Hospital. Some years ago, when my foot was by no means assured in the world of letters, the sub-editorship of the "Provision Dealers' Gazette" became vacant, and, through Crocker's interest, the post was offered to me. The emolument in itself was small; but it was large enough relatively to augment my income by a considerable percentage.

The nature of the work, it is true, was hardly sympathetic to a man who possessed, stowed away at home, or on their dreary pilgrimage from their birthplace to this and that Editor and back, two three-volume novels, a tragedy, a volume of poems and translations, and a series of character sketches after the manner of Thackeray. The present value of these literary treasures however, was, at this period, nil, and the void in the domestic exchequer was a grim reality; so I put my pride in my pocket and buckled to my sub-editorial duties. I could soon talk glibly enough about Gouda cheese, Waterford mild-cured bacon, and Cork and Holstein butter. I stuck to my post for two years, at the end of which period the provision dealers discovered that they could get on very well without a gazette of their own, so they turned their plant and offices over to a serious weekly, then just started, and discharged their staff without granting any pensions.

I believe that Crocker regarded me as a very ill-used man in this matter, and that his conscience pricked him because I had, through his counsel, accepted an appointment which promised to be permanent, but proved rather short-lived. Anyhow, he set to work to influence a friend of his in Drogheda, a rich bacon and butter merchant, who was also part proprietor of the East Tipperary Advertiser; and the end of it was that I was commissioned to supply a weekly London letter to the journal above-named. I began my new engagement with a light heart, for it was one much more to my taste than had been the chronicling the fluctuations of the provision market. I put my whole soul into my work; and now

sometimes, when I read over certain of my earlier effusions, I wonder how I found courage to put down on paper the astounding statements which I sent over as gospel truth for perusal in East Tipperary. It seemed as if I must have seen every new piece that came out at every theatre; that I had only to go down to Westminster and send in my card to summon whatever Minister I might wish to see out of the House, and either learn from his lips what was to be the direction of public affairs for the next week, or give him a few hints as to certain measures which the Empire as a whole, and East Tipperary in particular, would like to see put in the statute book without delay. I was hand-in-glove with most of the leaders of society, and able to speak, seemingly at first hand, in familiar terms of the Duke of Paddington's grand dinner in Grosvenor Square, and Lady Edgeware's last reception. My London letter soon became known beyond the limits of East Tipperary; and I was asked to furnish a like one for a Welsh journal, and another for a paper in the Eastern Counties. My pen has never been idle since, so I am justified, I think, in regarding Crocker as the founder of my fortunes, such as they are.

I learnt not long ago, by accident, that the widow of the luckless counterman—whose predilection for Bushy and its chest-nuts had so militated against his commercial success—the bereaved female of whom Crocker remarked that "he heard she had to go the workus," did not long remain a charge upon the rates. Crocker was soon to the front, and did not do his alms as certain great houses and corporations are in the habit of doing in like cases, giving a mangle, and a sovereign by way of working capital. In a certain suburb, the residential element seemed to be outgrowing the retail traders; and Crocker, with a keen eye to such matters, hired a house, stocked it with all the wonderful wares which go to make a "Berlin Wool Repository," and installed Mrs. Williams to distribute the same. The business grew and prospered, Mrs. Williams is now trading entirely on her own account, and if you make a purchase at her establishment, I will wager that you will not repass her threshold without first hearing a full account of Crocker and his good works. Mrs. Williams indeed is, in a way, a thorn in the flesh to her benefactor, for he is not one of that class who do their alms to be seen of men. As he goes about the world,

growling at this and grumbling at that, I believe he is always on the look-out for an opportunity to do a good turn to somebody; but he is terribly put out if the world should get wind of his benevolence, and he himself be forced to run the gauntlet of grateful speeches and admiring looks; and this is his inevitable fate whenever Mrs. Williams may happen to catch sight of him. To her, Crocker is a purse of the finest silk, though I am bound to say he never fails to flap the sow's ear in her face, in the most uncompromising manner, whenever they may meet.

This question of silk purses may, likewise, be considered in a reverse process, by going through one's list of acquaintances, and seeing whether it does not contain several names belonging to people who are made, if the worthless verdict of superficial observation be trusted, of the finest silk—people who seldom contradict and never offend; who, when you are in their society, have a way of making you feel that you stand on a level far higher than their own, and that you are, probably, superior to nine-tenths of the human race. But the work of art is not perfect. The hidden deformities are not entirely concealed. By a sudden movement the chaplet of roses is disturbed, and one may catch a glimpse of the ugly thing that lies beneath; in an unguarded moment, Nature reasserts herself, and amid soft accents and pleasant words one may hear an unmistakeable grunt.

Still, with a full knowledge that things are not altogether what they seem to be, I am not sure that, if I had just lost a large sum of money, or had been crossed in love, I should not prefer the society of one of this sort—though I might have grave doubts as to the sincerity of the individual—to an afternoon's drive with Crocker in the roomy chaise. But when the pinch comes, when resolute action and self-sacrifice are called for in place of soft petting and gentle cooing words; then, too often it is made manifest that the silk will neither wash nor wear. It will be fortunate, indeed, if the imperfections all turn out to be of a negative character; if one is not made aware, in unpleasant wise, that the porcine nature is in active working beneath the surface of the delicate silken exterior. These are they who will root up your choicest flowers and fruit trees when your back is turned, and perchance will turn and rend you unawares.

UNCLE BOB'S NIECE.

By LESLIE KEITH.

Author of "The Chilcotes," etc.

CHAPTER VI.

ALL this time has the modest clerk been left journeying on his way to Fulham, carrying with him to his suburban quarters a bundle of very unwonted sensations—seeing visions in the dusky November night, travelling long mental stages into new experiences, while his body was being whirled through lighted streets and unlit outskirts to its nightly destination.

As for the forward clerk, this history knows nothing of him. Doubtless, when he had eaten his portion of pie and of cake, and drunk his draught of tea, he went his way to the gallery of a theatre, to a smoking concert, or to some other haunt of mild dissipation. Not so John Temple. John Temple went home, when the bank released him, to Fulham and his sister Jessie. Not that he did not love a good play—tragedy, comedy, or melodrama—as well, in his quiet way, as anybody else. The jokes were not lost upon him; the tragic situations hit his weak point quite unerringly; he heartily loved his pipe and a good song; but above all things he loved most to do what other people expected of him; and his sister Jessie—Jessie, the ailing invalid, the exacting sufferer—listened for the sound of his key in the latch as regularly as the clock struck six.

Everybody called him John; he had never been Johnnie even in pinafore days, and it would indeed have suited ill with his six feet, his broad shoulders, and his brown, pointed beard. His cousin, Fred Temple, sometimes called him Jack; but it showed a singular want of discernment in that clever young man, for there was nothing of Jack about him. He was John all over; John in his serene gravity; John in his happy acquiescence in being let alone, and neglected, and not wanted; John in his readiness to come forward when there was a disagreeable task to perform, a piece of sad news to break, a friend to help out of a scrape.

Fulham is, no doubt, a very desirable place in the eyes of the people who live in its handsome houses, and go to garden parties at the Palace; indeed, to judge by the novelists, a villa at Fulham is a goal to be arrived at by aspiring young couples. But there is a side of

Fulham which is not at all aristocratic; a Fulham of the humbler clerk; a Fulham of villas so named by courtesy, that cling in close array side by side, and are poky and airless, and yet abound in draughts—where to enter the dining-room with dignity you must first back into the kitchen; where, in no corner whatsoever can you escape the all-pervading, unrelenting odour of cooking. Cooking in these little dwellings seems to go on all day, all the week, all the year round: the bacon of the morning mingles with the stew of midday, and melts finally into the Welsh rarebit of supper.

When John Temple went home on a night that was memorable to him, the odour of toasted cheese came out to him even before he walked up the tiny flagged path to the door. It seemed to rush at him with reproach.

"You are late," it said. "You are very late; you have kept me waiting to be eaten; you have flushed your sister Jessie's face; you have made her temples throb; you have tried her nerves and her temper, you have——"

Well, if the neglected supper did not say all this, Jessie Temple said it; said it in every line of her peevish face and accent of her voice; said it by the petulant action with which she threw off the kind hand that fell on her shoulder.

"I'm afraid I'm late, little woman," said John, deprecatingly. "You see I had a bit of an adventure that detained me; but I won't stop to tell it you now. I'll run up and wash my hands, and be with you in a minute."

"I don't see what is the use of having an early night if you are to be as late as usual, putting out all our calculations!" cried Jessie, unmollified by apology. "Sarah has been to the gate over and over again looking out for you; the supper will be quite spoiled."

"Supper, eh?" said John, oblivious for the moment of the cheese. Then he pulled himself up in time. To confess to the tea and the pie already enjoyed would but add to the cup of Jessie's tribulation. Better eat without an appetite than that.

"I won't be a minute," he said again; and he went off looking as if he must necessarily stoop his tall head to pass under the doorway. The little house never seemed such a ridiculous doll's house as when this big fellow was in it. It suited Jessie well enough. Jessie was small and fragile, and took but little space, and she

had no active, sprightly moods, no dancing impulses to make the furniture seem in the way and the ceiling too near the floor. She was only twenty; but she was already an old woman—old in suffering, old in disappointment, old even in looks, for her features, which were delicately cut, were pinched and drawn, and her eyes had an abiding, brooding sadness in their dark depths.

The girl whom John had met that night might be twenty also; no older than Jessie; but how unlike her in every respect save this! The wild-rose of that complexion; the blue of those shy, trustful eyes; the gold of that hair; the lightness of that springing step! John thought of them all as he came downstairs red and glowing with the vigour of his towelling. He had thought of little else, indeed, the whole way home; and while he was yet dwelling on those graces, yet mentally recalling that droop of the white lids that showed the dark lashes, that whimsical uplifting of the arched brows, that hand held out flutteringly and flutteringly withdrawn, his glance rested on Jessie stretched on the sofa, pale, sombre, and exhausted. Honest John Temple's heart smote him, and those wandering thoughts of his hovering round another burned in him like an infidelity.

He sat down by the couch and did what he could to make amends. It was not much, perhaps, but he did it without clumsiness. He punched the cushions, he shaded the light; he bathed Jessie's hot brow with eau-de-cologne; he fanned her with a Japanese fan which he reached with a long arm from the mantel-piece; and, finally, because he saw no other way of getting rid of the supper—still a bone of contention—he sat down and ate it. When the little maid had carried off the fragments, Jessie's amiability was in some measure restored.

"Well, what was the wonderful adventure?" she said grudgingly. "You haven't told me."

"No," said John. On the whole he would rather not have told it now. "Perhaps it won't seem much of an adventure to you."

"Perhaps not; very likely not; but I can't tell till I know what it was."

"Well, I met some people in—in a place where I was having some tea."

It was out now; it could no longer be hidden.

"Tea!" echoed Jessie, with a certain

languid contempt. "What a very healthy appetite you have, John!"

"You made me take supper," he said, feeling that this was a little too much to be borne in silence.

"Of course," she said impatiently. "Do you think I was going to let it be wasted when it was cooked on purpose for you? But do go on. You are so slow! You met some people. What kind of people?"

"An old Scotch fellow and his niece."

"How do you know she was his niece?"

"She called him uncle."

Did he not remember every word of the few words she had uttered?

"Well, then, how do you know he was Scotch?"

"That," said John with a smile, "was manifest from the outset. The North Briton cannot disguise himself. Even if there is not that in his gait, in the length of his upper lip, in the prominence of his cheek-bone, in the shrewdness of his eye, which betrays him, he has but to open his mouth and the secret is out. Scotch people never lose their native accent. I believe you and I may be discovered to retain a trace of it from our ancestors. This old fellow had not only the tongue, he had the hair and complexion of his race."

Now, this was a long speech for John. Jessie looked at him sharply while he uttered it. She was suspicious, as sick people often are; and she was observant, as they also often are, having but a narrow world to scan. Did John want to conceal anything behind this drapery of words?

"Was the girl Scotch too?" she asked. With Jessie, conversation partook of the nature of a catechism.

"I believe so. I should say so."

"Had she a long upper lip, and high cheek bones, and red hair, and a freckled skin?" she demanded relentlessly, turning on her pillow to gaze at him.

"No, she had not; she certainly had not—" he almost stumbled over the words in the eagerness of his denial. "She spoke with a marked accent. They lost their way," he hurried on, "that is, they did not know it, being strangers, and I was able to show it them. There, you have the whole affair—not much of an adventure after all, you see." He was quite eager she should not regard it as much of an adventure.

"Where did they want to go?" asked Jessie, who had not quite concluded her examination.

"To Prince's Gate."

"Do they know someone there?"

"I believe so. A Mrs. Popham, I think. An odd name, isn't it? Nothing Scotch about it, nor about ours either, for the matter of that."

"Considering our father was an Englishman, I don't think there's anything so very wonderful in that," said Jessie with contempt.

"To be sure. It was our mother who was Scotch. What was our mother's maiden name, do you remember?"

"Do I remember?" echoed Jessie tartly. "It would be rather odd if I didn't. It is rather odd that you don't, if you don't, seeing that I am her namesake."

"To be sure!" cried John again. "I was a fool to forget it;" but his pulses gave an onward throb and his dark face flushed as he spoke, for Jessie's name was—Jessie Burton Temple.

"I think you are very stupid to-night," she complained, "and if that was all your adventure, it was not worth being late for and keeping Sarah and me wondering if you had been run over, or upset, or something, and the tea overdrawn, and the toast burned to a cinder. Of course if you will be late, you must take the consequences."

"The consequences were not so very serious, for me, anyhow; I did very well," said John patiently, the more patiently because of his inward compunction. He had forgotten Jessie; he had forgotten everything—everything but the glances of those blue eyes, the smiles of those sweet lips.

"Shall I read a bit?" he asked cheerfully. The room was very hot; he would rather have been outside pacing the street at this its quietest hour, when the children were abed, and the organ-grinders, street-singers, the itinerant vendors, had at last ceased from troubling—out in the coolness, smoking his pipe under the watchful stars and thinking.

But John Temple was the last man to do a thing just because it was pleasant to himself; that was no reason, he would have said, and truly he would have believed it to be none.

He drew the evening paper from his pocket and read out all the more thrilling portions of intelligence, the scraps that are concocted to whet an appetite jaded by the labours of the day. The room was dark as well as hot, for the lamp was shaded to shield Jessie's eyes. He had to bend close to the printed page. It was a good face

the lamp illuminated—a kind, manly, and patient face; and it was a pleasant, quiet voice that filled the little room, but Jessie thought of neither, used as she was to both. She only felt in all her quivering nerves the rustle and crackle of the paper as he turned it in his hand, seeking out the most appetising morsels for her. At last she could bear it no longer, and she asked him, almost commanded him, petulantly to put it away.

To a less sound and wholesome nature Jessie's caprices would have been unendurable. She was "trying," as women say—a woman would probably have found her petulance insupportable. Women, who find an infinite indulgence for the other sex, and who will nurse and coddle the colds and coughs and headaches of their menkind with a quite shameless partiality, are much more severe towards each other. A sister, had Jessie had one, would very likely have scolded her, probably with bracing effect; but John, being a man—and a big, strong, healthy man—had a giant's compassion and pitying tenderness for this poor little woman's ails and aches. He was the more sorry, perhaps, because he could not understand, because he had never had so much as a headache himself, and very seldom indeed a grudging or an angry thought.

He tried a book next, turning the leaves with elaborate caution. How was he to guess that his very care, his anxiety to make no sound, tortured her as the rustle of the paper had not tortured her? How was he to know that she could not take in the sense of what he read, for listening, straining her ear, waiting in suspense for the faint fall of the leaf? Will he do it quietly—more quietly this time? Shall I hear or not hear it? One has to go through a long apprenticeship of sickness which leaves shattered nerves and a diseased sensibility behind it to understand all this.

John, in happy ignorance, read on steadily for a while—for a space during which a new suspicion came to harass and distress the sufferer on the sofa.

Suddenly Jessie got up.

"I am going to bed," she said.

"I think you'd better," he acquiesced, after a second's pause of astonishment at being pulled up thus short in the middle of a sentence; "I am sure you are very tired to-night. I'm afraid you don't find this story interesting."

"I find it as interesting as you do," she

said dryly; "quite as interesting. Perhaps I could even tell better what it was all about. Well, what was it about?"

"Eh?" he stammered, and looked confused. He turned to the back of the volume, and stared at it as if for inspiration:

"Well," he said, gathering confidence, "it is a love-story, you know. That's what most novels are, I suppose. We'd have come to the interesting bit if you had had a little patience."

"A little fiddlestick!" said Jessie with contempt. "As if you could deceive me. I've been looking at you—I've been watching you—you've been thinking about that girl all the time. Why didn't you say she was pretty!" she demanded, turning on him at the door. "Do you think it matters to me? Do you think I care just because I am old before my time—old and faded, and ugly with sickness and trouble? Do you think I grudge her her good looks—her pink and white cheeks, her red lips, her light hair? Oh, I know—I know. If you do!" she menaced him breathlessly—"if you do——!"

"Jessie," said John, rallying from a confounded dumb silence that had stricken him at this accusation; "Jessie, my poor dear, let me carry you up stairs—you are quite worn out."

"No, thank you," she flashed a look of anger at him out of her sombre eyes, "I don't require your help; your 'poor dear' can walk up stairs, as she always does. She is thankful that that is left to her. It will be more to the purpose if you can spare a thought to put the chain on the door and turn out the lamp when you are ready to leave the room, unless you would like poor Sarah to do it for you?" And with this last small sting she left him, to toil feebly upstairs to her little room, and there to cry out her jealous, fretful heart in secret—left him to do all the repenting, to feel that he had somehow behaved like a brute and ruffian. How was it that, with the most blameless intentions, he always blundered?

Jessie had quite unerringly guessed the direction of his thoughts. While he was angry with himself for his neglect and forgetfulness of this poor little sister of his, he found a certain meed of admiration for her acuteness. It was clever of her to find out about this strange girl; and to describe her too, as if she had seen her!

"Pink and white," she had said; "red-lipped. How could Jessie think of that?"

There were never prettier lips made to smile; and the pink of those blushing cheeks was of the wild rose."

Oh, wise John, grave John, faithful brother John! You rate yourself one moment for the folly of your thoughts; and you but see the sin, to commit it again, to revel in it, to sit till the lamp burns low, with this same foolish fancy for your comrade.

Tilly, a nice little name, no longer than Jessie, but sweeter to the ear—a Tilly must needs be sprightly, gay, and smiling, with no lurking severities to repel. Tilly Burton! Odd that, very odd, and his mother a Burton too! Was Burton a common name on the Scottish border? Was it owned, for instance, by such a clan as the Joneses and the Smiths of England? What Smith would dream of claiming kindred with every other Smith who crossed his path? Did not the members of that overgrown family spell their joint surname in every conceivable fashion to escape the obligation of implied relationship? But Burton, there was but one way of spelling that, and you did not meet with it every day. You seldom met with it at all, unless on the label of the pale ale you took for lunch. There could be but one stem from which the branches sprang, and, starting with this premiss, to what other conclusion could you come but that the Burtons on this side of Tweed and on that must all be related—cousins in one degree of nearness or another, whether they knew it or not? A very pleasant conclusion, truly, when the cousin to be claimed is a young, pretty girl, who has—well, who has rather taken your fancy.

Temple set himself to try and recall all he knew and had heard of his mother, and he was surprised to find how little he did know. She had died when Jessie was a baby, and he vaguely knew that she had been ailing and melancholy. He tried vainly to recall her face, her manner, her ways; they had faded too hopelessly from his memory. He could revive no stories she had told him of her youth in her Northern home; nothing of her was left to him but a blurred, uncertain outline of a woman who had somehow missed happiness, and had, perhaps, died not unwillingly.

When he turned his thoughts to his father, he found them much more defined and precise. His father had outlived his mother a good many years, and they had been years of wretchedness, of unmitigated wretchedness. There was nothing to

soften the harshness of this judgement, no lighter gleams to relieve the black gloom of that downward-going path that ended mercifully in death. Remembering all this, it was not difficult to imagine that his mother might, with reason, have been unhappy.

John Temple, senior, had never at any time been successful—never done anything for anybody to be proud of. He had not got on, for instance, as his brother, the father of cousin Fred, had got on, and was, for the matter of that, getting on still. Only last year had he been summoned to attend the housekeeper at the Hall, where his predecessor never penetrated, and this very Christmas he had had the honour of examining the Earl's own tongue, of feeling his pulse, and taking his temperature; and if that has not a symptom of progression, when a man had already the health of half a county in his charge, of what, pray, does progress consist?

So in this very year of grace, Dr. Temple was trotting along the muddy country lanes on his fat nag; fat himself and smiling and complacent, feeling pulses and pocketing guineas, and "Fred, the young dog, was a Government servant, and swaggered about in swell London society, in quite tip-top society, if you please. No satisfying the rascal when he comes down here! I'm too old-fashioned for him, that I am," the doctor would say to a listening patient, mentioning casually with a shake of the head, that tried vainly to be dissatisfied and doubtful, that Fred had dined with the Honourable So-and-so last night, and was to lunch with my Lord Blank to-day. And John—honest John, whom nobody would have dreamed of calling a young dog—was plodding away in Jones's bank; and John's father was in his grave these fifteen years, and if anyone remembered him at all it was with a thankful conviction that he had gone where the wicked cease from troubling.

Even his son, who had quite a woman's tenderness of heart, tried to forget this unworthy parent as often as he could. It was easier to forget than to judge and condemn, since no summing up, however skilful, could pronounce him innocent. Sometimes Jessie reminded him of the father whom she could herself scarcely remember with distinctness. There was a look in the eye, a droop of the mouth, that awoke to sudden life a brood of ugly memories in him; but these never made him less tender to her; rather more. They

were but traits—inherited tricks. Jessie was a woman, and a suffering woman; thank Heaven! she could never be what their father had been.

Thus dwelling unwillingly on the past, leaving it gladly for the present, and mingling that, in the happy inconstancy of his thoughts, with the future, Temple kept wondering if he should ever see Tilly again, or rather, when he should see Tilly again; and how she was getting on with that Mrs. Popham, of the ridiculous name; and whether she had spoken of that tea in the Brompton Road? His thoughts might finally have been all of Tilly, if there had not suddenly flashed on him a remembrance of a bundle of old letters seen somewhere—where? when?—letters that were said to have been written by his mother. Here was a key to the mystery of her birth, could he but lay hands on it. He searched his memory vainly for a time, and then with one of those illuminations that sometimes happily light up the dark corners of the mind, he recalled the very spot where they were hidden.

It was in a secret recess of one of those old-fashioned *escritoires* which serve the double purpose of chest-of-drawers and desk. This was too large and clumsy a piece of furniture for any room in the little house, and it stood in the passage just outside Jessie's door. Only a slim Jessie could have slipped past it without danger to elbow or ankle; as for John, it was a terror to him every time he approached it. Suppose he fell against it, and woke Jessie out of that first sleep so precious to the invalid? Suppose the door, which slid back in a groove, should creak from long disuse? Suppose the recess refused to deliver its secret without protesting jerks and groans? His curiosity must have been keen indeed to surmount all these "supposes."

Like a thief he crept up the little stair and listened, candle in hand, outside Jessie's door. Reassured by the answering silence from within, he proceeded to divest himself of boots and coat, and thus unencumbered to creep stealthily as any burglar into the narrow space that too inadequately accommodated his bulk.

Would the lid of the desk creak? No; the workmanship was good and solid; the lid slid back without a sound. And now for the recess. Ah, there was a perceptible groan of the dry wood! How loud it sounded

in the hush of the night! Would Jessie jump up in a fright and confront him, pale and nervous, to overwhelm him with shame and reproach? He paused, conscience-stricken, to listen. No; all was still wrapped in unbroken silence, and here, without further ado, the little door flew open, and in the corner, neglected, half covered with dust, was the precious bundle he sought.

He stole with it on tiptoe to his room, thankful to have escaped detection, and there by the dim light of his candle, he proceeded to examine his treasure.

Why had he not asked of it its secret long ago? He could scarcely tell. Poor voice out of the past, now that he tardily gave it audience, what had it to say? Not much; the ink was faded and the lines blurred, and there was but little more piquancy in the sentiments than there is fragrance or beauty in last year's rose-leaves. The letters were dated from London, and were written by the wife to the husband while the latter was absent, as he often was, from home.

They were in no sense love letters such as Temple imagined a happy wife might still pen after years of wedded life; perhaps love was dead, and duty only survived. They were languid, inert, depressed as the writer herself must have been; no longings for the wandering husband's return; hardly a meagre allusion to the children—to Jessie and himself. Some chance only, and no merit in themselves, had saved them from destruction. Out of the ashes of long dead fires he lit on but one spark. "When I was young; in the old days at Liliesmuir—" it had fallen, perhaps, as a faint reproach on the receiver's ear; it was all Temple found to prize, or cherish.

At Liliesmuir—Liliesmuir—where might that be? It had a Scotch ring. Would those other Burtons, who were Scotch too, know the latitude and longitude of it? Might it perhaps be familiar and dear to them as it had been to his mother when she was young? He would find out. When next he saw them he would bring the name in cunningly—casually. He would watch their looks—Tilly's looks, her arching brows, her surprised, frank eyes.

When next he saw them! In the whirl of his excited thought it seemed so possible—so certain, so beyond a hazard that they should meet again.

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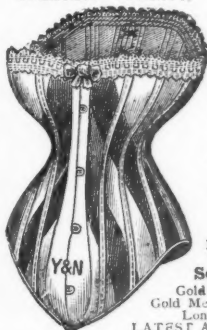
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